

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 5, 2020

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BAY COUNTY ISSUES UPDATE ON COVID-19

PANAMA CITY, Fla. — Bay County is responding to COVID-19. To keep Bay County residents and visitors safe and aware regarding the status of the virus, the Bay County Joint Information Center will issue daily updates. The Florida Department of Health has launched a [COVID-19 dashboard](#) that will be updated daily at 10 am. The state also provides a report detailing surveillance data for every Florida county. The surveillance data report is available [here](#).

Bay County's total COVID-19 cases is at 76, including 75 residents and one non-resident. While Bay County's testing is increasing, the percent of those testing positive for COVID-19 overall is 4%. Of the 1,717 tests processed, there are 1,639 negative results. There are three Florida resident deaths in Bay County from COVID-19. The total hospitalizations count is at ten including nine residents and one non-resident.

The addresses of the 75 positive Bay County residents include; 48 in Panama City, 12 in Panama City Beach, one in Southport, six in Lynn Haven, one in Parker, three in Youngstown, one in Tyndall Air Force Base, and three in Callaway.

The Florida Department of Health also releases a list of long-term care facilities in Florida associated with COVID-19 cases with active cases and number of deaths in each facility in order to provide real-time data. The list of long-term care facilities with active COVID-19 cases is available [here](#). The list of long-term care facilities with deaths is available [here](#).

FLORIDA STATE PARKS

Effective Tuesday, May 5, 2020: **St. Andrews State Park** is open for day use, 8 a.m. to sunset, for active recreation only, such as walking, jogging, swimming and fishing. Restrooms and trash cans are available, all other park facilities are closed. Normal park fees apply. Visitors are expected to maintain safe social distances of at least 6 feet apart and limit group size to 10 people.

Effective Monday, May 4, 2020: **Camp Helen State Park** is open for day use, 8 a.m. to sunset, for active recreation only, such as walking, jogging, swimming and fishing. Restrooms and trash cans are available, all other park facilities are closed. Normal park fees apply. Visitors are expected to maintain safe social distances of at least 6 feet apart and limit group size to 10 people.

View the full list of limited partial park openings at <https://www.floridastateparks.org/learn/safety>.

TESTING

TESTING PRIORITIES

High Priority

- Hospitalized patients
- Healthcare facility workers, workers in congregate living settings, and first responders with symptoms

- Residents in long-term care facilities or other congregate living settings, including correctional and detention facilities and shelters, **with** symptoms

Persons identified by public health officials or clinicians as high priority

- Persons **with** symptoms of a possible infection with COVID-19, including: fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, new loss of taste or smell, vomiting or diarrhea, and/or sore throat.
- Persons **without** symptoms who come from racial and ethnic minority groups disproportionately affected by adverse COVID-19 outcomes-currently African Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, some American Indian tribes (e.g., Navajo Nation).
- Persons **without** symptoms who are prioritized by health departments or clinicians, including but not limited to: public health monitoring, sentinel surveillance, presence of underlying medical condition or disability, residency in a congregate housing setting such as a homeless shelter or long term care facility, or screening of other asymptomatic individuals according to state and local plans.

Stop the spread and call ahead. Please review the criteria for testing for community-based testing sites below. There is no out of pocket costs for testing at any of these sites.

For COVID-19 screening call the **Florida Department of Health in Bay County at (850) 872-4455** (Please note at this time DOH-Bay can only test high priority clients with symptoms), **Ascension Medical Group at (850) 746-2684 or PanCare Health at (850) 215-4181.**

If you meet testing criteria, you will be given instructions on where, when, and how samples will be collected for testing.

EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS

Get medical attention immediately.

- **Difficulty breathing** or shortness of breath
- Persistent **pain or pressure** in the **chest**
- New **confusion** or **inability to arouse**
- **Bluish lips or face**

For more information on what to do if you think you were exposed to COVID-19, visit [FloridaHealthCOVID19.gov/exposure](https://www.floridahealth.gov/exposure).

Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step.

Phase I of the ***Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step.*** Plan to Re-Open Florida began Monday, May 4.

Phase I includes the following:

- Schools remain distance learning.
- Visits to senior living facilities are prohibited.
- Elective surgeries can resume.
- Restaurants may offer outdoor seating with six feet between tables and indoor seating at 25% capacity.
- Retail can operate at 25% of indoor capacity.
- No change for bars, gyms, and personal services such as hair salons.
- Vulnerable individuals should avoid close contact with people outside the home.
- All individuals, when in public, should maximize physical distance from others.
- Avoid socializing in groups of more than 10 people in circumstances that do not readily allow for physical distancing.

- Face masks are recommended for all those in face-to-face interactions and where you can't social distance.

BEACHES

Bay County and Panama City Beach beaches are now open.

People who are 65 and over or living with underlying health conditions should continue to follow the safer at home public health advisory. Continue to practice social distancing. Do your part, stay 6 feet apart. Keep groups to 10 persons or less. Pack hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Avoid touching your face.

For more information visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/visitors.html>.

REOPENING GUIDANCE FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PUBLIC SPACES, WORKPLACES, BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS, AND HOMES

This guidance is intended for all Americans, whether you own a business, run a school, or want to ensure the cleanliness and safety of your home. Reopening America requires all of us to move forward together by practicing social distancing and other daily habits to reduce our risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. Reopening the country also strongly relies on public health strategies, including increased testing of people for the virus, social distancing, isolation, and keeping track of how someone infected might have infected other people. This plan is part of the larger United States Government plan and focuses on cleaning and disinfecting public spaces, workplaces, businesses, schools, and can also be applied to your home.

Read the full guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

CLOTH FACE COVERS/MASK

Wearing a cloth face covering CORRECTLY can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others when you go out on essential trips.

Your cloth face covering should:

- ✓ Reach above the nose, below the chin, and completely cover the mouth and nostrils
- ✓ Fit snugly against the sides of the face
- ✓ Be made of multiple layers of fabric that you can still breathe through
- ✓ Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damaging the material or shape

When removing your face mask, individuals should be careful not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth when removing their face covering and wash hands immediately after removing.

If you have a child, remember those under age 2 should not wear a face covering.

For information visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>.

Mask Kits from Gulf Coast State College Available and Tutorial

Gulf Coast State College has created more than 7,500 community mask kits. These are available in packs of 20 at JOANN, 413 East 23rd Street Panama City and at Marie's Fabrics & Notions, 1501 Mulberry Ave, Ste 2, Panama City, FL 32405

JOANN store information: <https://stores.joann.com/fl/panama-city/2298/>

Marie's: (850) 784-4848

Watch this video tutorial from Gulf Coast State College: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSMpfJ8-TbU>

CARING FOR CHILDREN

Based on available evidence, children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults. While some children and infants have been sick with COVID-19, adults make up most of the known cases to date.

It's not known yet whether some children may be at higher risk for severe illness, for example, children with underlying medical conditions and special healthcare needs. There is more to learn about how the disease impacts children. You can learn more about who is most at risk for health problems if they have COVID-19 infection on [Are You at Higher Risk for Severe Illness](#).

Read the full guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html>

CARING FOR PETS

Until we learn more about how this virus affects animals, treat pets as you would other human family members to protect them from a possible infection.

- Do not let pets interact with people or other animals outside the household.
- Keep cats indoors when possible to prevent them from interacting with other animals or people.
- Walk dogs on a leash, maintaining at least 6 feet (2 meters) from other people and animals.
- Avoid dog parks or public places where a large number of people and dogs gather.

There is a small number of animals around the world reported to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, mostly after having contact with a person with COVID-19. Talk to your veterinarian if your pet gets sick or if you have any concerns about your pet's health.

Read the full guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>

COVID-19 CLEANING AND DISINFECTANT CHEMICAL EXPOSURE PRECAUTIONS

Reports of exposure to cleaners and disinfectants to poison centers increased substantially in March 2020 corresponding with the rise in #COVID19 cases. Learn more about these reports and how to safely use cleaning chemicals: <https://bit.ly/3eBv2d5>.

For Poisoning Emergencies Call 1-800-222-1222 V/TTY. Text POISON to 797979 to add poison control as a contact in your phone.

HOUSEHOLDS LIVING IN CLOSE QUARTERS

This guidance is intended for people living together in close quarters, such as people who share a small apartment, or for people who live in the same household with large or extended families.

Read the full guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/living-in-close-quarters.html>

HEALTH CARE

Hospitals

Bay County's hospitals are ready and willing to serve your emergency care needs. Ascension Sacred Heart Bay and Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center want the community to know that their emergency rooms are safe. They are following CDC guidelines to keep you and your family protected from COVID-19. They say they are seeing persons who are coming in for care later than they should and they are concerned for the well-being of the community members they serve. If you have an emergency, call 911 or go to the emergency room at either hospital.

Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center is offering a special website for COVID-19. Visit <https://gcmc-pc.com/covid-19/index.dot> for a COVID-19 self-assessment, information on visitation, and other COVID-19 resources. Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center is now allowing one visitor per patient, but they have to identify the visitor when they arrive and they can't switch out visitors.

Ascension Sacred Heart Bay also has a special website for COVID-19 available at <https://healthcare.ascension.org/covid-19>. There you will find information on their visitation policies and education on COVID-19. Ascension Sacred Heart Bay has resumed elective surgeries and non-emergent cases as of 5/4/20. They have changed their visitor policy to allow one visitor per person in the building. They are now testing all elective surgical cases for COVID-19 prior to surgery in accordance with Ascension guidelines.

Hospitals are not testing sites but are testing their patients that meet criteria for COVID-19.

Mental Health

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people of all ages. Fear and anxiety about the unknown can sometimes feel overwhelming to adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others call Bay County's Crisis line at (850) 522-4485.

Mental health providers in Bay County are open and available to serve your needs, primarily through telehealth options.

More information from the CDC: <https://bit.ly/2XLPq57>

Bay County Sheriff's Office

The Bay County Jail has an additional method to "visit" an inmate. By going on a website or calling a number, families and friends of inmates can visit from a home computer or using a mobile device. It does

cost money, so the original video visitation is still available in the lobby of the Jail, which remains open. It is hoped the new method will decrease traffic into the jail.

Watch for COVID-19 scams. 1) There is not FDA approved home testing kit for COVID 19. Do not buy them. 2) Do not give personal information or click on a link or open an attachment in an email sent by the CDC. The CDC will not send you an unsolicited email. 3) Do not give to COVID-19 related fundraising events or charities you have never before encountered. Validate all charities before you give. 4) The IRS will not be calling the American public to confirm bank account numbers to facilitate the disbursement of COVID-19 relief checks.

The sandy beaches of Bay County are closed. The exception is property owners. If someone owns waterfront property, whether directly or through a property owners association, they can be on the sandy beach down to the high water line. Property owners are not allowed in the water right now. Boats are allowed in the water. Surfers are allowed in the water if they arrive and leave by boat and don't surf to the sand. Property owners are allowed to sit on the sand and engage in recreational activities, as long as they are not in groups of 10 or more.

ORDERS

Bay County

The Bay County Board of County Commissioners convened on March 17, 2020 where they voted 5-0 to declare a Local State of Emergency (LSE) (Resolution #3700) for Bay County as part of our response to COVID-19.

The Bay County Emergency Management Division is at a Level I – Full Virtual Activation supporting the Department of Health in Bay County.

Callaway

The City of Callaway is under a State of Health Emergency as declared by Bay County Board of County Commissioners.

Lynn Haven

To follow the lead of Governor Ron DeSantis and the Bay County Board of County Commissioners, the City Commission declared a Local State of Emergency (LSE) for the City of Lynn Haven on March 18, 2020. In an effort to better distribute information and updates for the City concerning COVID-19 (Coronavirus) we have added an alert section on the City website titled COVID-19 City Updates/Alerts. To subscribe to these alerts please select the light teal subscribe button on our main page of the City website: www.cityoflynnhaven.com.

Mexico Beach

The City of Mexico Beach is under a State of Health Emergency as declared by Bay County Board of County Commissioners.

Panama City

To follow the lead of Governor Ron DeSantis and the Bay County Board of County Commissioners, the City Commission declared a Local State of Emergency (LSE) for the City of Panama City on March 18, 2020.

Panama City Beach

The City of Panama City Beach is under a State of Health Emergency as declared by Bay County Board of County Commissioners. Visit www.beachpolice.org for more information and to file a police report online.

Parker

The City of Parker is under a State of Health Emergency as declared by Bay County Board of County Commissioners. Check our website, www.CityofParker.com, for important links to the Health Department, Bay County EOC and other resources for information on COVID-19 and what you can do to try to stay safe.

Springfield

To follow the lead of Governor Ron DeSantis and the Bay County Board of County Commissioners, the City Commission declared a Local State of Emergency (LSE) for the City of Springfield on March 17, 2020.

Tyndall Air Force Base

The 325th FW Commander has directed Health Protection Condition (HPCON) CHARLIE (SUBSTANTIAL, Sustained community transmission) in response to COVID-19. This action is precautionary. In the case of an unusual health risk, the Department of Defense uses health protection measures known as HPCONs, to determine what actions are needed to best protect the base populace and surrounding community.

Naval Support Activity Panama City

Navy Region Southeast has directed Health Protection Condition (HPCON) CHARLIE (SUBSTANTIAL, Sustained community transmission) in response to COVID-19. This action is precautionary. In the case of an unusual health risk, the DoD uses health protection measures known as HPCONs, to determine what actions are needed to best protect the base populace and surrounding community.

PANAMA CITY BEACH

CLOSURES

Bay County

The business lobbies of the Bay County Board of County Commissioners are closed to the public effective March 24, 2020 in an effort to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

Tax Collector's Office

The Bay County Tax Collector's lobbies are officially closed to walk in customers for the foreseeable future. They are will serve the community through their call center, online services, and mail and drop box locations. For the most critical needs they are doing appointment only for customers who pass a health screening.

Courts

The 14th Judicial Circuit, is not holding court proceedings and trials until further notice. Essential court proceedings are still in place via video and restricted to the public. When possible they recommend you utilize online services or call for assistance (850-763-9061) whenever possible.

Libraries

All Northwest Regional Library System branches are closed to the public. Curbside services will resume at select branches starting on May 4th. Bay County Public Library Curbside: Monday - Saturday from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. The BCPL computer lab is accessible for essential tasks during Monday - Saturday from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.; 1:30 - 4:45 p.m. for a 1-hour session per day. Panama City Beach Public Library Curbside: Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. There will not be any overdue fines at this time. Questions? Call 850 -522-2100.

UF/IFAS Extension Office

UF/IFAS Extension Bay County educational programs, events, and meetings scheduled through April 30, 2020 have been postponed due to direction from the University of Florida concerning COVID-19.

Bay County Sheriff's Office

Lobby is closed and fingerprinting services are suspended until further notice.

Education

Bay District Schools will remain closed for the rest of the school year based on the guidance from the Florida Department of Education. Information on meal service and distance education can be found at <http://www.bay.k12.fl.us/COVID%2019>. You can also call their information line at (850) 767-HELP (4357). This week is Teacher Appreciation Week and Bay District Schools, with the help of 17 local sponsors, is kicking off a week-long virtual celebration of our instructional employees. Food delivery/distribution and graduation plans continue. Planning for a summer feeding program is also taking place. Bay District Schools announced that our Bay Base program will be available this summer.

Florida State University-Panama City Is closed for face to face classes, but will finish out the semester with all classed moved to an on-line platform. Florida State University has made the decision to temporarily waive the Graduate Records Examinations (GRE) requirements and the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) for Master's and Specialist applicants applying to the Fall 2020 term.

Gulf Coast State College Is closed for face to face classes, but will finish out the semester with all classed moved to an on-line platform.

Callaway

The City of Callaway to close lobbies on March 23, 2020 to the following- Callaway City Hall, customer service, Utility Billing, Building/permitting, Code Enforcement, Public Works, Fire Dept. and Arts and Conference center. All services will remain available but the lobbies to these departments will be closed. For more information go to www.cityofcalloway.com

Lynn Haven

As of April 2, 2020, the offices at the City of Lynn Haven and the Lynn Haven Police Department remain closed to the public.

Mexico Beach

City Hall lobby will be closed until further notice. To make utility payments place it in the drop-box located outside of City Hall, call (850) 648-5700 ext. 1, pay online at www.mexicobeachgov.com

Panama City

City Hall Lobby is closed to the public, all services remain available. Utility Billing – Citizens may pay their utility bill either:

- Online at the City's website: <https://www.pcgov.org/358/Online-Payments>
- Drop-box at the backside of the U.S. Post Office in Downtown Panama City
- Mail-in
- 24-Hour phone line at (855) 748-3080, you need your account number available

The lobby of the Panama City Police Department is closed through at least April 15, 2020. Fingerprinting services at the Panama City Police Department are suspended through at least April 15, 2020. When visiting www.panamacitypolice.org, citizens of Panama City will now have the option to file a police report online. The online report system allows citizens to submit a report 24 hours a day, seven days a week via any internet-enabled computer or mobile device.

Parker

City Hall is closed to the public until further notice. Citizens are encouraged to pay their Utility Bills with the following options:

- Online at the City's website: www.cityofparker.com
- City of Parker drop box located at 1001 W. Park St, Parker, FL 32404
- Mail-in to City of Parker, 1001 W. Park St., Parker, FL 32404
- By phone 1-866-480-8552

Springfield

City Hall will be in moderate lock down. We ask utility payments be made online or utilize the drop box located at City Hall. Please call or email if you need any assistance verses coming to City Hall. Staff will answer your questions or issue. (850) 872-7570. Online at the City's website: www.SpringfieldFL.net

PUBLIC SERVICES

Food Banks

The United Way of Northwest Florida is posting information about food banks and other resources in conjunction with Rebuild Bay. Visit <http://unitedwaynwfl.org/>.

United Way of Northwest Florida

The United Way of Northwest Florida is providing information on public service closures and what is available in our area. Please visit their dedicated webpage at <http://unitedwaynwfl.org/covid-19/>. You may also utilize their 211 service for referrals, just call 211 from any phone or visit <https://211nwfl.communityos.org/>.

Rebuild Bay County

Rebuild Bay County may have resources available to assist persons in need. Visit <https://rebuildbaycounty.org/> for more information.

State Resources

The Florida Department of Health has many public service opportunities available on their website including information for businesses, reemployment assistance, and mental health resources. Just visit <https://floridahealthcovid19.gov/public-services/>.

MORE INFORMATION ON COVID-19

For text alert updates from the Florida Department of Health in Bay County, text bayhealth to 888-777. For additional information specific to Bay County, visit BayHealthCOVID19.com. You may also contact

the Citizens Information Center 7 days a week from 10 am – 6 pm at (850) 248-6090 or email ask@baycountyfl.gov.

For state level text alerts in the fight against COVID-19, text FLCOVID19 to 888-777.

To find the most up-to-date information and guidance on COVID-19, please visit the Department of Health's dedicated COVID-19 website. For information and advisories from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), please visit the CDC COVID-19 website. For more information about current travel advisories issued by the U.S. Department of State, please visit the travel advisory website.

For any other questions related to COVID-19 in Florida, please contact the Department's dedicated COVID-19 Call Center by calling (866) 779-6121. The Call Center is available 24 hours per day. Inquiries may also be emailed to COVID-19@flhealth.gov.